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Introduction

In this article I discuss Luther's theology of preaching with a view to the theme of the presence of Christ. This theme is most often discussed under the rubric of Luther's sacramental theology, most notably in his Eucharist theology. But in this essay I first underscore this theme in relationship to his theology of preaching, and then use it to examine the relationship between word and sacrament. In sum, I argue that proclamation illumines God in Christ's non-manipulative presence, while sacrament illumines Christ's available presence; two modes of the single presence made available by grace through faith. I conclude the essay by exploring the utility of reclaiming Luther's theme of Christ present in word and sacrament for the life of a church in an altogether different world from his.

Luther and the Church as *Mundhaus*

An oft quoted expression of Luther is his assertion that the church is a Mundhaus/mouth-house not a Federhaus/pen-house.[1] The church is about the business of preaching not writing. The

[1] Dr. Martin Luthers Werke (Weimar: Bohlau, 1883–1993). (Hearafter cited as WA). Band 11-2 , 626.

faithful come to the church in order to hear the word. It is not enough to read the word. In Luther's estimation, something significant and unusual happens in proclamation:

> "Furthermore, Christ Himself is present when I preach. ... For Christ is present and makes my words come true."[2]

Two points bear consideration from this short, but provocative quotation. The first is that Christ himself is present in the event of preaching. The second is that Christ makes my words come true. We consider the latter first.

Luther understands that the words of the sermon demand two elements: the gospel and faith. The former indicates what is to be preached and the latter indicates what the gospel creates in its hearing. In Luther's theology, the foundational content of the preached word is the gospel. The gospel is simply, according to Luther, the good news that God in Christ accepts us unconditionally for Christ's sake. Of course, things are never quite so simple as they first appear, and as one wanders and wonders deeper into the thought of Luther, clarifications, if not qualifications, attend this simple description of the unconditional. The first theme that comes to the fore more generally in the thought of Luther is that the gospel in the broad sense of the world includes both law and gospel, in the narrow sense of the word. The law names the human condition of sinful rebellion against God, and articulates clearly God's will for humankind in light of our inability to attain what God covets for us. The gospel in the narrow sense of the word names God's promise to meet our very need. Oswald Bayer has convincingly argued that

[2] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1958-86). Hereafter cited as LW. Volume 12, 386

Luther's theology is centered on the theme of promise.[3] The gospel in the narrow sense is about the promise of God. The gospel then, is not about our promise, nor our ability to promise. Our inability to keep the promises we make points to both our sins and our finitude. Our refusal to recognize this inability points to our sin, as in our original sin. This understanding of sin accords, in a fashion, with the broader Augustinian theme of sin as *curvatus in se*. Yet, for Luther, this Augustinian interpretation is generally set against the broader backdrop of breaking the first table of the commandments, and specifically the first commandment. The human is not only self-centred, but this self-centring is an act of self assertion in which the human claims more for the self than it can deliver. This is at the heart of Luther's critique of Erasmus: to claim for the human a free will simply fails to take account of the fact that only God has a will that is truly free, that is, a will that enables one to project a future unconditionally. The human attains to future life in a mode of brokenness, which makes all promises conditional and so fractured. God alone can promise in the truest sense of the word. The content of the sermon, to sum up, is to name the human inability to promise so that the human is able to hear the promise of God for what is: news that is doubly good insofar as the human need not worry about being God and can rejoice in being human. These are the words that Christ makes true by being present in preaching. In Luther's estimation, these are Christ's words, preached by Christ through the preacher's halting and faulting efforts. These words, as Christ proclaims them in the proclamation of Christ, evoke faith. I now consider this corollary of the gospel in Luther's theology.

[3] Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, Trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 95.

In one of Luther's Church Postils on the text for Christmas eve (Luke 2:1-14), he explores the significance of Christ present for faith:

> Christ has a pure, innocent, holy birth. [The hu]man has an impure, sinful, damned birth … There is no remedy for this except through the pure birth of Christ. Now the birth of Christ cannot be distributed physically, even as that would not be of any help either. For this reason it is distributed spiritually, by means of the word …. Christ willed to be born so that we might be born in a different manner … In this manner Christ takes to himself our birth and absorbs it in his birth; he presents us with his birth so that we become pure and new in it, as if it were our own, so that every Christian might rejoice in this birth of Christ and glory in it no less that if he, too, like Christ, had been born bodily of Mary.[4]

The Christian's ability to identify Mary as her mother, Christ as her brother and God as her father is a theme that points in a fundamental way to the identification of the Christian with Christ by means of the word. The Christian is absorbed into the birth of Christ. For Luther, this is not only part and parcel of the gospel; this is the heart of the gospel. Christ is present to draw us into the life of God by grace through faith and so faith, too, is a fundamental theme in the sermon.

Luther's treatment of faith is well rehearsed in Protestantism. Alas, faith's accent is most often misplaced in telling Luther's tale. As of late, the Finnish school of Luther research has resurrected an oft forgotten point of emphasis in Luther's treatment of faith.[5] Lutherans are

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[4] LW-52, 15.

[5] Readers can find English translations and treatments of the Finnish school of Luther research in the following: Carl E/ Braaten and Robert W. Jensen, Union with Christ: the New Finnish Interpretation of Luther (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Tuomo Mannermaa, 'Theosis as a Subject of Finnish Luther Research', *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995): 37-47; Tuomo Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World*. Translated, edited and introduced by Kirsi I. Stjerna. Afterword by Juhani Forsberg. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010. Tuomo Mannermaa's *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Fortress Press, 2005);, Olli-Pekka Vainio (ed.), *Engaging Luther: A (New) Theological Assessment* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010).

again beginning to see that the faith as construed in enlightenment sensibilities is far off the mark in Luther's thought world. They again recognize and underscore that Luther's favoured description of faith is as *in ipsa fide Christus adest*: in faith itself, Christ is present. Christ is present in faith; and in Luther's theological world, Christ is the master of his presence. Such a description of faith thoroughly assaults modern sensibilities, as clearly as it upended many of Luther's interlocutors in his own day. If faith is Christ present in the believer, the believer has absolutely no credit to claim for even faith itself, which has too often been the crack in which protestant pelagianism has firmly ensconced itself.

The gospel, then, is God's promise to be present to claim to the hearer that God accepts the human unconditionally by grace through faith. This latter faith is itself named as the presence of God in the believer as a gift of God. The presence of Christ, then, relates the content of the Gospel – grace as unconditional gift – to the effect of the Gospel, that is, faith. The sermon, for Luther, is not an announcement of all of this as an offer. That would be far too weak for Luther. The sermon does not offer grace to the hearer, the sermon graces the hearer. This is a tall order to fill, and for this reason Luther underscores that this promising character of the sermon only advances by divine right insofar as where believers hear preachers of the gospel "they should believe for certain that they are hearing Christ Himself."[6] Moreover, insofar as it is God in Christ proclaiming the promise, Luther will say of the sermon: "... in the case of God to speak is to do, and the word is the deed."[7] God does something in the sermon in that God continues what was begun in baptism and is consumed at the Eucharistic foretaste of the feast to

[6] LW-12, 171
[7] LW-12, 33.

come: God justifies sinners. Luther knows well the scandal of this assertion, and so he cuts sinners off at the pass as they obscure the divine act in word and sacrament:

> You assert that faith is your doing, your power, your work; and thereby you interfere with God's work.[8]

The reader of the American edition will note that the translator, for sake of clarity has changed Luther's original "my work" with "God's work." Luther in preaching this actually said: "you assert that faith is your doing, your power, your work; and thereby you interfere with my work."[9] The rhetoric of the piece concretizes a theological assertion: God is speaking alongside of, or through the words of the preacher. The hearer of the word encounters God in Christ, who speaks new life into the hearer. This turn to the word in the manner in which we find it in Luther, is something new. Robert Jenson, then, with good reason asserts that Luther replaces the medieval appropriation of Aristotle's "we are what we see" to "we are what we hear."[10] Jenson's observation invites us to posit that if medieval thinkers were enamored with a beatific vision, Luther proposed a beatific hearing in its stead. Modern interpreters of Luther rightly underscore this advance as an important move in the Reformation. It is important to explore, however, exceptions within Luther and his own innovative turn.

Audio versus *Video?*

[8] LW-23, 181.
[9] Cf. WA 33, 286: "Ir meinet, glewben sei ewers thuns, ewer krafft und wreck, und fallt mir zu frühe drein…"
[10] Triune Grace in The Gift of Grace, 26.

Those who read Luther often know all too well that he is not a systematic theologian. Luther is only all too happy to contradict himself; to posit provocative thoughts that he does not intend to be taken literally, but to be wrestled with. Luther most often writes to change people, to provoke or comfort them; not to inform them. Yet, a broader reading of Luther will affirm that certain themes regularly and repeatedly come to the fore: themes that point to contours of his world-view. The predominance of hearing, which was discussed above, is further explored and clarified in a passage such as that found in his exposition of Psalm 23:

> "Yes," you may say, "but how shall I know that the Lord is my Shepherd? I have not experienced that He is as friendly toward me as the psalm says; in fact, I have experienced the opposite. David was a holy prophet and a man dear and precious to God; so it was easy for him to speak of the matter and to believe what he spoke. But I cannot emulate him, for I am a poor sinner." Answer: I have shown above that in itself a sheep has chiefly this good attribute and fine virtue, that it knows the voice of its shepherd well and is guided more by its ears than its eyes. [11]

Note well: a sheep knows the voice of its shepherd well and is guided more by its ears than its eyes. Jenson, with his assertion that we see in a Luther a turn from the eyes to the ears, can properly turn to a passage like this for support. Yet, this passage also opens the door for an alternate reading of Luther's thought that we do not want to ignore. Luther was not only an innovator and provocateur at what some consider the beginning of a modern age; he was also a man with his feet firmly planted in the middle ages.[12] Students of Luther, today, are learning anew that Luther had not read Kant, not to mention Hegel; and although his knowledge of

[11] LW 12, 158.

[12] Cf. Christine Helmer, "Introduction," in *The Global Luther: A Theologian for Modern Times*, ed. Christine Helmer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 4.

Aquinas is tainted by a tendency to use Biel as a lens through which to read earlier medieval theologians, careful readers of Luther are aware of an indebtedness to a broad range of catholic thought and, at times, even Aristotelian philosophy. Luther betrays this propensity in the above quotation. Note well that he claims that a sheep is guided by the ears *more* than by the eyes: not *instead* of the eyes. Luther has not lost sight of his eyes, as it were, yet as with many classic themes, Luther grants it a new twist. Here, the theme is the Aristotelian *conversio ad phantasmata*. The twist is its intersection with faith.

Thomas knows well, from Aristotle, that human knowing is sensual. This theme is treated in ST I.84.7. Thomas picks it up from Aristotle's "On the Soul." (iii.7)[13] This insight more generally supports both Aquinas' and Luther's sacramental theologies. Human knowing depends on the senses, including sight. Luther, then, follows this classic epistemology and although he gives hearing pride of place, he does not dismiss the role of sight. Yet, in treating sight in the *conversio*, it is interesting to note what he does with sight. Consider the following:

> For here there are two kinds of sight and of hearing. The one is performed with physical eyes and ears, entirely without the Spirit. … The second is a spiritual sight, which only Christians have and which takes place by means of faith in the heart. With this—if we are Christians—we must also view and recognize one another. For I do not recognize a Christian by his external appearance and mien, by how he acts and lives, but by the fact that he is baptized and has God's Word. This makes him a child of God, a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, and an heir of eternal life. I do not see this inscribed on his nose or his forehead, nor do I discern it with my physical eye. I see it with the spiritual vision of the heart.[14]

Luther points to a spiritual seeing and hearing both, although he here describes a spiritual *seeing* (as demanded by the biblical text, John 14:7). Yet Luther aims at something more than a

[13] Aristotle, *On the Soul*, Trans. W.S.Hett (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 175-179.
[14] LW 24, 33.

metaphor in pointing to a new kind of seeing and hearing. Although hearing clearly takes priority for Luther,[15] here we read that hearing too needs to be made new and makes possible a new kind of seeing. Readers of Luther are tempted, here, to move towards a thoroughly spiritual apprehension of Luther's thought, and thereby make a fundamental error; an error grounded in the mistaken assumption that Luther is fundamentally and finally interested in redemption alone. Oswald Bayer, for example, has noted that interpreters of Luther distort his thought concerning justification when they fail to attend to his theology of justification in concert with both his theology of creation and the eschatological implications of justification.[16] Bayer asserts that creation, as certainly as redemption, is a gift from God. [17] In so doing, he follws the lead of older Luther scholars, such as Regin Prenter and Gustaf Wingren, who established that Luther's theology of creation is remarkably robust.[18] God meets us in the guise of promise in both redemption and creation. God in Christ thereby opens the world to us, and invites us into a posture of wonderment at the beauty of creation. In commenting on the creation of the birds from the swarms of water in Genesis 1:20 Luther comments:

> These things are written down and must be carefully learned that we may learn to be filled with wonderment at the power of the Divine Majesty and from those wonderful deeds build up our faith. Nothing—even raising the dead—is comparable to the wonderful work of producing a bird out of water. We do not wonder at these things, because through our daily association with them we have lost our wonderment. But if

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[15] LW 23, 109.

[16] Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, Trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). xvi.

[17] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 95.

[18] Cf. Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, Trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953); Regin Prenter, *Creation and Redemption*, Trans. Theodor I. Jensen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967); Gustav Wingren *Creation and Law*, Trans. Ross Mackenzie (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961); Gustav Wingren *Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1979); Gustav Wingren, *The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church*, Trans. Victor C. Prague (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960) .

> anyone believes them and regards them more attentively, he is compelled to wonder at them, and his wonderment gradually strengthens his faith.[19]

Faith gives us new eyes to see, to see creation anew and creation then strengthens faith. The two are interdependent. Creation, then, is not to be despised; and most certainly not the creation of our eyes. Eyes too are a gift of the Creator, and so it is not too surprising that they are also used to give insight into the gifts of God. Luther writes that we "do not reduce faith to such an empty and insipid idea; but we say: Faith consists in this, that we see the content and the object of faith." [20] Faith is safeguarded from being a mere concept by being linked to the activity of sight. Luther comments that

> As I look at you, I do not see whether you are black or white, rich or poor, dressed this way or that way. No, I see that you were baptized, that you were washed in that water, and that you listen to the Gospel. But they do not do this; that is not the way they look at a person. They will never acquire the skill to see Baptism on a person's forehead. [21]

The heart has eyes that reason does not know; and for this reason, Luther likens faith to an art.[22] Art points to the ability to apprehend the whole in the part, and the part in the whole; to comprehend what we see only in part, or hear in part, for that matter. The art of seeing and hearing does not thereby bypass the senses, but finds in the senses a point of departure. Faith is an experience of being grasped by the Christ encountered in the heart[23] precisely because in faith, Christ himself is present so as to transform the believer by his union with her. Luther notes

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[19] LW 1, 49.
[20] LW 23, 128.
[21] LW 23, 334.
[22] LW 23, 73, 75.
[23] LW-24, 33.

that God *durchgottet* the heart of the believer.[24] This is made possible by the grace of the Holy Spirit, whom Christ has made to be a preacher,[25] the Holy Spirit who works the Word according to the will of the Father.

In sum, Luther readily returns to both sight and hearing as the principle means by which to point the believer to the work of Christ and the Spirit because human thought advances by means of sensual imagery. This is inescapable. It is interesting to note, that in so exploring the nature of faith, Luther privileges hearing, yet not to the exclusion of sight. However, his appeal to sight is ever qualified, and its deployment is generally illumined by sacramental illustration. This is not too surprising, in that Luther affirms after Augustine *et al* the image of the sacraments as visible words. So, then, Luther seems to appeal to both sight and hearing, giving hearing a kind of pride of place, yet in service of a new kind of seeing. I submit that these two, hearing and sight, more broadly relate to the doctrinal categories of word and sacrament, and invite us to consider how these two relate to one another insofar as they are two means by which Christ is present as the content of the Gospel which evokes faith.

Word and Sacrament and the Real Presence of Christ

What I propose in this section of the paper may be considered a bit too neat for Luther. What I intend to do, however, is to underscore a general trajectory of thought in Luther rather than establish what follows as Luther's systematic treatment of word and sacrament. What I propose,

[24] LW-24, 87, n 51. The English translation of "permeates" is too weak.
[25] LW-24, 362.

then is as follows: insofar as word and sacrament more broadly relate to the human sensual capacities of hearing and seeing; and insofar as they do so together by grace of the real presence of Christ in faith, the two together correlate to a series of binaries in the thought of Luther that really each attend to a single and signal reality. The binary pairs I discuss below are related in turn to word and sacrament and are: pride and despair; redemption and creation; and finally forensic and existential justification. With these pairings I address the manner in which Christ's presence together what we may be inclined to sunder. I begin with Luther's treatment of pride and despair.

As noted above, Luther underscored that law precedes gospel, and the law point to the situation of sin. The law speaks to our inability to right ourselves before God and others. This inability generally manifests itself in one of two fashions: despair or pride. Interpreters of Luther sometimes narrate these two conditions as if they were sequential: the proud are hit with the hammer of the law to the effect that they are rendered despondent and now ready to hear the gospel. This neither accords with reality nor Luther's thought.[26] The law is spoken to both the proud and despairing, but differently. The law as hammer shatters the proud assumptions of the human who has no need of God and so proclaims the self God and thereby breaks the first commandment claiming that "because I am god, I as self sufficient and without need of the Other." The law as a mirror reflects the despondence that results from a refusal to see God as able to meet a need; that is, a refusal to see whom God truly is and thereby a breaking of the first commandment as well. This despair declares that "because God does not keep the divine promise, I cannot be promising." The law stirs up and addresses both pride and despair, and so

[26] Cf Luther's thought in the Smalcald Articles, III, 2,3 in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* Eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, Various Trans. (Minneapolis:Fortress Press, 2010).

prepares the sinner to hear the gospel by the means of grace, by way of word and sacrament. At this point, word and sacrament, in a rough parallel, address and respond to the different needs manifest in these two modes of sinfulness. To the sinner in despair, sacrament underscores the nearness of God in created reality for salvation. Just as God wonderfully made the world, so I am wonderfully made. To the sinner in pride, word underscores that God comes to us *extra nobis*. Just as hearing is external to us, so is the help we finally require. Neither hearing nor help can be orchestrated. God's word comes from outside the self, and so the self is rendered patient upon the word from afar. Self certainty is shattered by the externality of the word as surely as despair is upended by a hope that is located in what I can see, taste, smell and feel. Word and sacrament differently respond to the need evoked by law. The careful reader of Luther, however, will want to know that there is law, and then there is law. This distinction is the basis for considering the relationship of creation to redemption in the thought of Luther.

In addition to the above treatment of the law, normally named the second use of the law, Luther also spoke of the first use of the law, that is, the civil use of the law. This is generally understood to reflect the laws that regulate and run a society. This is a correct, but in itself, it is too narrow an understanding of the first use of the law. The first use of the law also addresses more generally God's ordering of the cosmos for the good of all of creation.[27] Luther's attention to the theme of creation was noted above. In what follows I connect, in a rough manner, Luther's interest in creation with his theology of the sacraments and his interest in redemption with his theology of the Word, recognizing some overlap. I ground these distinctions in the fact that the sacraments are dependent on what is fundamentally created matter (water, wheat, and

[27] Allen Jorgenson, "On the Art of Distinguishing Law from Law," in *Transformative Theological Perspectives* Ed. Karen L. Bloomquist, (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2009), 155-166.

wine) while the preached Word is grounded in the divine "Let there be" of the creation narrative, whose very voicing precludes the necessity of creating language. Redemption evokes the image of the uncreated Word that calls into being the created reality that is embraced in sacramental usage. The overlap between the two is evident in Luther's treatment of vocation. This speaks clearly to the affirmation of the ordinary, a theme most recently explored as a foundation for modern thought by Charles Taylor.[28] Beyond this, Vítor Westhelle has noted how Luther's very use of language affirms the diversity and richness of the created order. Luther's interest in drawing language from outside of theological discourse into the proclamation of the church speaks to his assertion of the ancient church's maxim that the finite is capable of bearing the infinite by God's grace. Lutheran thought, however, and those unfortunate enough to parrot it at its worst, has too often frozen the distinction between creation and redemption so as to sunder what Martin has joined together. Gustaf Wingren's treatment of Luther and the Creed outlines how Luther and those before him considered the narrative pattern of the creed as instructive for faith.[29] Creation precedes redemption for a reason in the creed, according to Wingren. Creation presume a pattern of promise that undergirds order. This ordering reminds faith that God is deeply invested in materiality, and this is not to be despised. Luther's lectures on Genesis 1 and 2 superbly explore this theme and mimic his delight in underscoring how the sacraments employ the ordinary matter of creation. In an important way, this materiality and the goodness of creation it evidences, are especially clear in the sacraments; in water, wheat and wine. Word, accordingly, more clearly references externality of our experience of redemption. I propose, then that one does not betray Luther by asserting that redemption and creation both are fundamentally

[28] Cf. especially *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 211-302.
[29] Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law*, trans. Ross Mckenzie (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 41.

nested in word and sacrament; the two are united by Christ present to make both effective for the faith Christ creates for redemption. This brings us, then, to a point of some contention in the thought of Luther and Lutheranism: the nature of justification and its identity as a forensic or existential image, or both.

The debates regarding the role of the forensic and existential metaphors for justification run far back in Lutheran history. In sum, the forensic image – which I broadly correlate to Word – points to the assertion that God declares us justified in the court and more importantly, the heart, of God regardless of whether we are, or feel, or are perceived to be vivified by the Spirit. The existential image, which I correlate to sacrament, points to God making us new: giving us a new heart, a new birth, and even an eschatologically conditioned new will and reason. Luther used both images with equal fervour, as did the "Magna Carta" of the Lutheran church, the Augsburg Confession. Post-Luther Lutheranism was generally not happy with this arrangement and argued for the primacy of the forensic model. In a way, they followed the spirit of Luther here, insofar as hearing is accorded a kind of primacy for Luther, as discussed above. The problem, as it were, was that over time and especially during that time called the Enlightenment, the forensic model held sway as hearing bested seeing in the court of human reason. Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* deemed the sacraments, along with the rituals and apparati of the church, to be for those weak in the head. The mature believer has no need of such foolishness, and so Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* introduces "thinking alone" that divorces what Luther, and many before him, held together: hearing and seeing, word and sacrament, forensic and existential. The Finnish school of Luther research and its followers has done Lutheran theologians a great service in reminding us to read Luther as a man of his day, not Kant's, nor ours. They have reminded us that the existential theme is of some significance

for Luther, although they variously argue its significance in relationship to the forensic. Some interpreters of the Finnish school of thought see the existential image as primary, while others argue that one cannot make a case for the primacy of either, while still others point to the need to revisit a kind of logical priority to Luther's attention to the forensic image.[30] The two are held together, in any event, by the themes attending the image of the real presence of Christ for faith and make possible discourse concerning a believer's union with Christ. Moreover, this is a union that is respectful of the assertion that divinization (of a piece with the existential image) does not make of the human God (strongly reflected in the forensic image). Insofar as it is Christ's presence from afar as a strange and foreign word which makes faith effective, echoes of the forensic model come to the fore. Insofar as the believer sees, tastes, smells, and feels the presence of Christ as that promised by God in sacrament, the existential model comes to the fore. In sum, the two modes of word and sacrament reflect in part the reality of justification as an declaration and an action by the justifying God, who justifies in response to human need.

In sum, word and sacrament meet the human as creature, sinner, and child of God in a manner fitting to her need. Because this need is manifold, Christ is present in both word and sacrament in a distinctive ways that are not divorced. A final word is needed, however, to address the priority of word over sacrament in the thought of Luther. As noted above, Luther accords a kind of pride of place to word, insofar as hearing is an instance of passivity par excellence. Yet, it also needs to be noted that Luther often made strong and profound appeals to sacramental life. In moments of *Anfechtung*, his riposte to sin, death, and the devil was "But I am

[30] Kristen Graff-Kallevåg outlines the importance of the first position in "United with Christ in Baptism" in *Theological Practices That Matter*, ed. Karen L. Bloomquist (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2009), 111-123. Simon Peura argues in "Baptism, Justification, and the Joint Declaration" in *The Gift of Grace*, 121, 122 that one cannot prioritize the two moments of justification. Risto Saarinen discusses the third position in *Engaging Luther* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 17.

baptized!" In short, there are moments when a strategic appeal to sacrament *first* is warranted. How, then, might one relate these two? I propose the following: word has a kind of priority over sacrament in that it initiates theological discourse *extra nobis*. Beyond this beginning point, in the life of the believer, different priorities obtain. I contend that the priority of word over sacrament addresses us in our unbelief, while the priority of sacrament over word addresses us in our finitude. When I doubt God, the external word awakens faith. When I doubt myself; when I wallow in the fact that I am dust and to dust I will return; water, wheat and wine point to God's embrace of the finite. In either event we have need of the Christ whose very presence speaks of the gracious God who is available as the one who cannot be manipulated and so thoroughly trusted: God is finally not made in my image and shatters my idol making propensity thoroughly and for my benefit. Now, in conclusion, we ask whether all of this has any utility for a time such as ours, so thoroughly removed from the world-view of Luther.

Conclusion

At a time when people avoid churches like the plague, it might well appear foolish to ponder the possibilities of the theme of the real presence of Christ; what do people care about theological arguments concerning Christ's presence? But perhaps the manner in which we generally ponder dogmatic utility might be fundamentally mistaken. We too readily state that doctrine helps us to explain faith to the world and forget that the doctrine also helps to explain the world to the faithful. I contend that this latter is the piece most missing in our churches, and so what we most need to ponder for the future of the church. The theme that we turn to, then, for an

understanding of the world in which we live is the real presence of Christ, manifest in word and sacrament as non-manipulative and yet available for the sake of the faithful as they engage their faith in their world.

An important starting point, then, is to ask which world we engage. The world is too easily made to be an abstraction in the thought of Christians. But if God in Christ embraces the world in embracing water, wheat and wine, then it is fitting for Christians to think about their world in the most concrete terms possible. What world do we live in? Mine has often been described as the "New World." This, of course, is preposterous. This is a world, a land, a place with a long history, an aboriginal history, and where there is history, there is God. And the sacraments teach us that where God is, God is present in a mode of availability. God has been available to this land and the people of this land from the origin because baptism and Eucharist remind us that this the pattern of God's activity in the world. We might ask ourselves what might happen if the churches became acquainted with their neighbours, with their neighbourhood, and with the histories of their neighbourhoods with the belief that these are places where God has been working for a long while. What might happen if we viewed our context sacramentally?

This would be a good beginning, but another step is needed. We also need to view our world under the tutelage of the word. The word reminds us that God's pattern of presence is such that God cannot be manipulated; God's work cannot be orchestrated; God's work must be suffered and endured; we wait upon the word. When we view the world through the lens of the word, we are reminded that God's ways might be discerned, but they cannot be presaged. When we look at the world through the word, we anticipate what cannot be anticipated; we hold forth the possibility, indeed the probability, that we will be proven wrong yet again, and we will

rejoice in that, knowing that a God who astonishes us is a God who delights us. A church that views the world through the word is ready and willing to explore the world, hot on the traces of the divine.

When we view the world through word and sacrament, we look for God's promised presence anywhere and everywhere; and we listen for God's call, beckoning us to futures we might not have expected. In sum, those who approach the world under the tutelage of word and sacrament; with curiosity and anticipation find not only God in the world, but also themselves.